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Students get introduction to law at Learning Center

BY ROBERT GUBBINS
Legal News

"Twelve thousand people a year visit the Michigan Supreme Court Learning Center," said Rachael L. Drenovsky, Learning Center Coordinator.

Located in the Hall of Justice in Lansing, the Learning Center, which opened its doors in 2002, is a public education center that introduces children and adults to the Michigan Court system.

Designed for students from the fourth grade to adults, the Learning Center is filled with activities including an introductory video, interactive computer programs, push button programs, and traditional wall text panels. The exhibits are designed to promote questions and discussion.

"This summer," said Drenovsky, "we have two programs, called Exploring Careers in the Law, planned for middle and high school students." Middle school students will learn about legal careers. The week-long program, which includes a visit to the Ingham County 54A District Court, is scheduled for July.

"The program for high school students takes place in June," she said. The students will prepare an appellate argument using facts from a case decided by the Michigan Court of

Appeals. The students play all the roles.

Drenovsky and volunteer judges, lawyers, court staff and law students teach both courses.

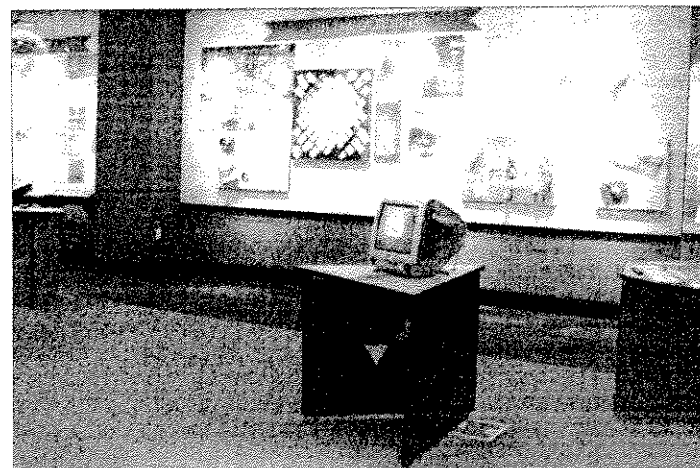
A Law Day celebration, called Liberty Under the Law, takes place on May 1. Programs will focus on the heritage of liberty under the law and how the rule of law makes democracy possible in the United States.

The Learning Center is a resource for educators and others who speak on the court system in Michigan. This summer a full-day seminar for kindergarten through twelfth grade educators is planned.

"We also have resource guides for teaching core democratic values, the role of oral arguments in the appellate process in Michigan Supreme Court and MEAP (Michigan Educational Assessment Program) benchmarks for social studies," Drenovsky said.

Exhibits in the Learning Center are divided into two categories. The "How the Court affects You" exhibits include information on voting rights, traffic citations, freedom of the press, locker searches at school and the three branches of government. The trial courtroom, an exhibit for "A Day in the Court," includes computer activities examining the roles of courtroom personnel.

Visitors to the Learning Center come from



THE MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT Learning Center located in the Hall of Justice in Lansing introduces children and adults to the Michigan court system. If interested in volunteering at the center, contact Kristen Osterlund at (517) 373-7229.

Photo by Roberta Gubbins

around the state, the country and the world. Recently a group from the Republic of Moldova toured the center. Visitors have also come from California, Oregon, Florida and Germany, Russia and the Czech Republic. Walk-ins, who can take a self-guided tour, are welcome.

Groups can schedule tours that are led by trained volunteers. "Tours generally focus on the Michigan Court System," said Drenovsky. "They can also be tailored to a teacher's particular concerns."

The Learning Center depends on volunteers to conduct tours, assist with programs and prepare materials for distribution. "Volunteers come from all walks of life," said Drenovsky. "We have practicing and retired lawyers, educators, law students and those interested in the topic. We are seeking volunteers now. Our next training begins in March."

For more information, visit <http://www.courts.michigan.gov/pic/resources.htm> or contact Rachel Drenovsky at (517) 373-5027.